

GPO'S APPRENTICES

GPO History Talk

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APPRENTICESHIP



Printing and bookbinding are trades deeply anchored in the traditions and practices of apprentice training. The making of books developed in the age of guilds, and the understanding of the trade has always been passed from master to novice.



Historically, inexperienced (generally young) workers were bound (with written agreements) to work for experienced craftsmen, usually for little or no wage beyond room & board, for a set period ranging from 3 to 7 years. From there they would progress to being “journeymen” for another set period.

GPO AND APPRENTICESHIP

- The Public Printer first gained authority to train apprentices in 1895, although an annual report from 1887 indicates that some were on the scene before that. Public Printer Thomas Benedict registered his displeasure with the practice:
- **My own judgment is that the Government should only employ skilled labor, and it is not beneficial to any class of mechanics [i. e. printers and bookbinders] to be trained on the job.”**



GPO AND APPRENTICESHIP

- Congress, it seems, did not share his convictions, and in 1895, authorized apprenticeship at GPO as a provision of the mammoth Printing Act of 1895.

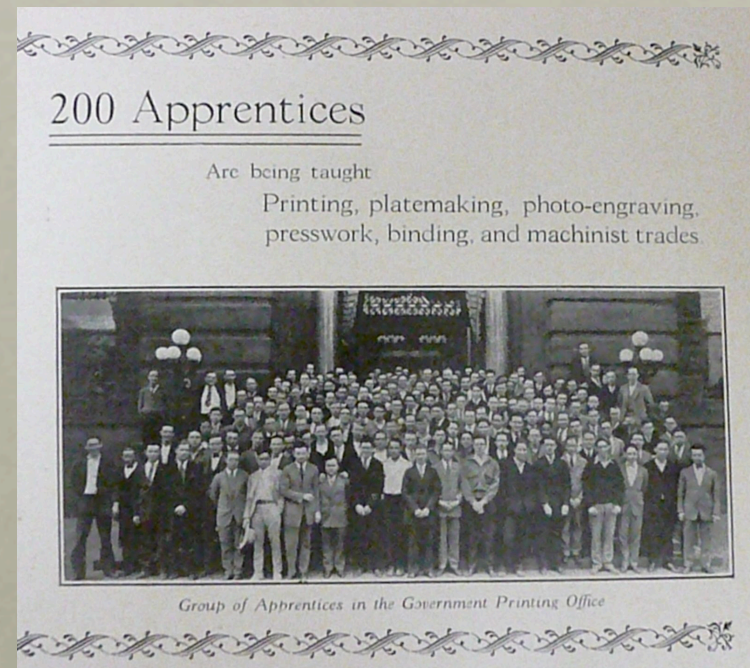
GPO AND APPRENTICESHIP

- That authority, however, wasn't exercised until 1922, when Public Printer George H. Carter argued that,
- "It is highly essential that GPO resume the work of training its own workers."



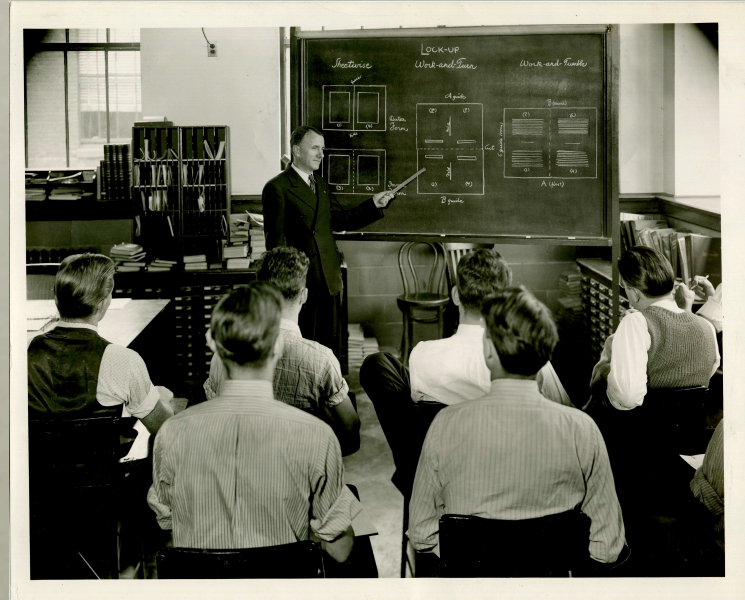
APPRENTICES AT GPO

- Mr. Carter was responsible for many Progressive Era reforms at GPO.
- After arranging for the Civil Service Commission to conduct an examination to provide candidates, he appointed the 25 the law allowed in 1923. He then sought and received authority to hire more, and Congress raised the limit to 200.



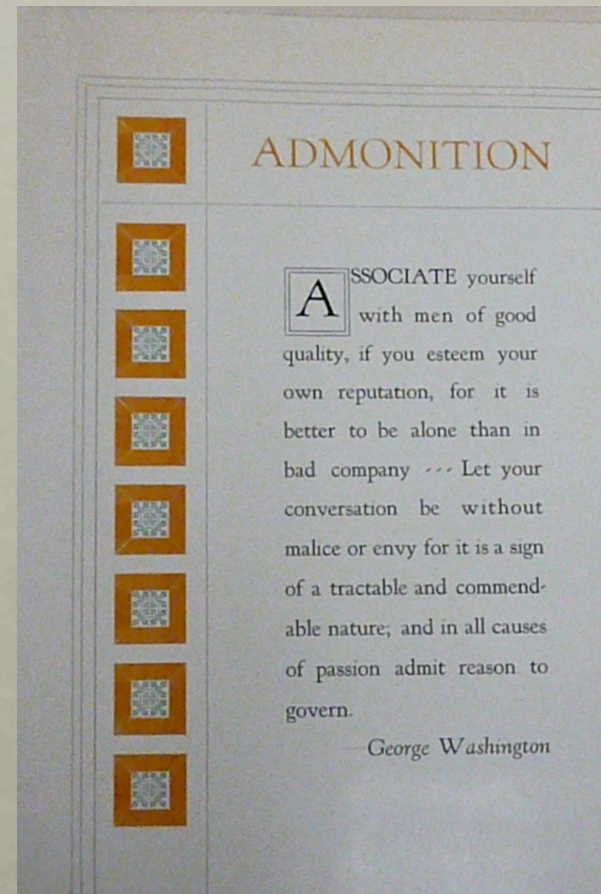
APPRENTICES AT GPO

- Students received practical instruction as well as classroom work in academic subjects such as grammar and history.



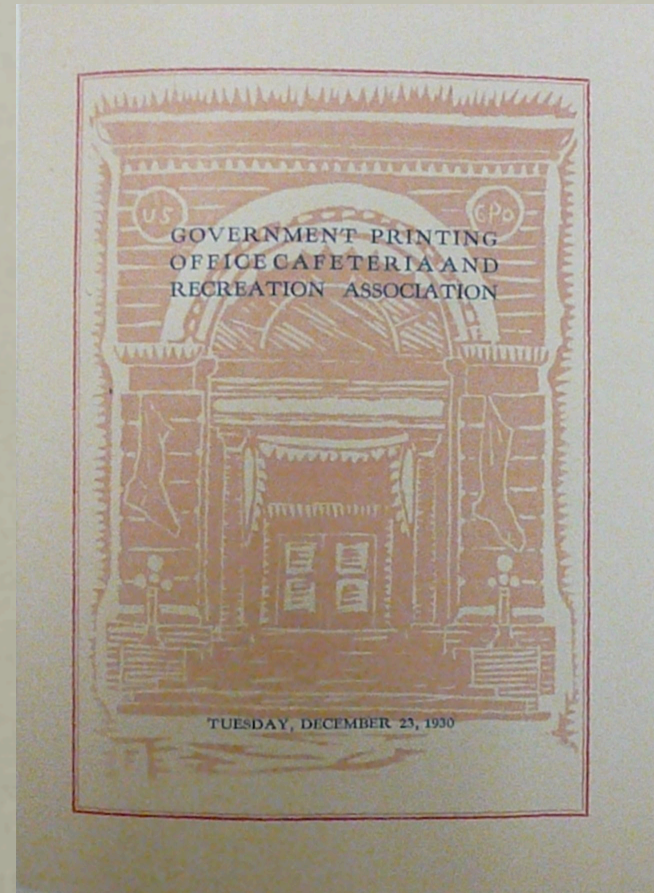
APPRENTICES AT GPO

- Mr. Carter reported:
- “For patriotic motives. . .the first copy [set up in type by students] consists of Washington’s Farewell Address . . .Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, . . . and the Star Spangled Banner



APPRENTICES AT GPO

- The apprentice school grew steadily and became integral to GPO's daily life. Most internal communications (cafeteria menus, posters, newsletters, announcements) were set up and printed by apprentices, who also served as guides for the many tours of "the big shop."



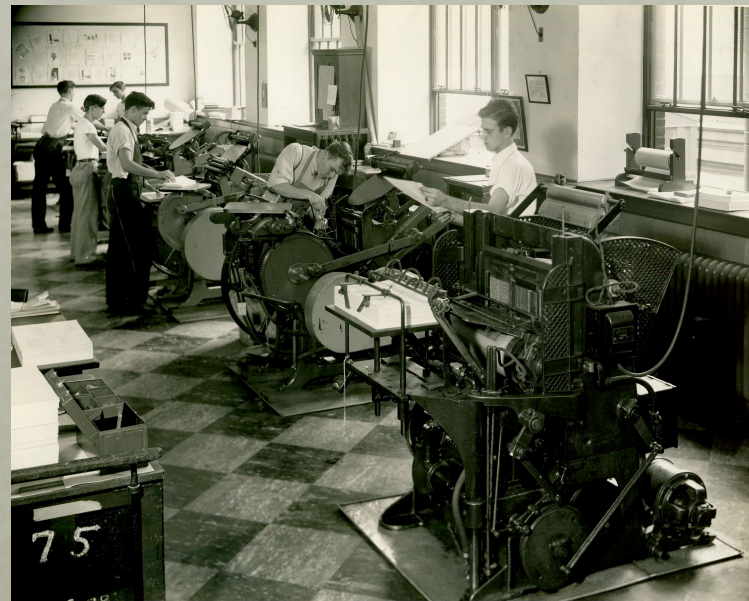
APPRENTICES AT GPO



GPO apprentices often (perhaps mostly) spent the rest of their working lives at GPO.

APPRENTICES AT GPO

- The school flourished in its 1920s/30s form until World War II, when it was discontinued for the duration. It was restored, accepting only veterans, in 1947. From then until the 1970s numbers grew, and the classes were more racially diverse, but only men were recruited.



APPRENTICES AT GPO

Women were originally eligible for appointment, and a few were apprentices in the early years. The first admitted were Blanche Boisvert and Beulah Farrell in 1931. Boisvert became the first female graduate in 1935. Of 93 in the class of 1940, 4 were women, all compositors, including Mary King (right).



APPRENTICES AT GPO

- Women rejoined the apprentice ranks in 1974



APPRENTICES AT GPO

- Apprentice classes today are recruited periodically, as demand for particular skills dictates.

